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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a literature review and survey of community colleges with honors programs, this paper presents a series of recommended strategies and tactics for the establishment and continuation of community college honors programs. The recommendations are structured around the five developmental stages of academic innovation identified by S. V. Martorana and Eileen Kuhns: exploration, formulation, trial, refinement, and institutionalization. The strategies listed under the exploration stage include: "Create a demand for honors programs," "form an honors planning committee," and "create a formal proposal for an honors program." Under the formulation stage, the paper presents the following strategies: "circulate, discuss, and modify the formal proposal"; "determine obstacles and confront opposition"; and "address faculty development needs." For the trial stage, the strategies are to "begin the trial project," "initiate an informal evaluation and readjustment procedure," and "identify and recruit students." The refinement stage consists of such strategies as "distribute the results of informal evaluation and evaluation by external agents," "initiate follow-up studies of graduates of the trial program," and "set up an advisory committee of students and community representatives." Finally, for the institutionalization stage, the strategies are: "select personnel for decision-making positions," "establish permanent office locations," and "increase recruitment activity." The paper concludes with a brief summary of Martorana and Kuhn's "Interactive Forces Theory," a list of reasons why honors programs should be established and supported, and quotes from educational leaders in support of honors programs. (RO)

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Preface

The following recommendations are based upon data gathered during a study conducted by the researcher beginning in the summer of 1983 and continuing through to the present date. The intent was to provide academic decision makers (both administrators and faculty) with specific recommendations regarding the establishment and continuation of community college honors programs. The study involved several stages including the following: reviewing the professional literature related to collegiate honors programs and the theory of academic change, sending a survey to community colleges in the Eastern United States concerning their honors programs, studying in-depth the planning processes employed by three particular community colleges that had well established programs, and developing a formal proposal for a particular college wishing to initiate an honors program.

The recommendations are structured around the five developmental stages of academic innovation theorized by S.V. Martorana and Eileen Kuhns. (A brief summary of Martorana's and Kuhn's theory is provided). This theory is outlined in their book Managing Academic Change.

The term "strategy" is used within this handout to mean one of several plans of action employed to assist in achieving the goal of establishing a successful honors program. The term "tactic" is used to mean specific actions taken to implement strategies. Tactics are ways of carrying out strategies. A combination of strategies is used to achieve an overall goal, in this instance the establishment of an honors program.

The planners of honors programs like other academic innovators, obviously have a limited amount of time, energy, and funds available to them. This list of recommendations should not, therefore, be read as a list of necessary activities. It should be read, however, as a list of possible activities that have been found to be effective.

Recommended Strategies and Tactics

EXPLORATION STAGE

A. Strategy: Create a demand for honors programs.

A1. Tactic: Top administrator or respected faculty member takes the initiative to become a change agent.

A2. Tactic: Need for honors program emphasized in graduation speeches, annual reports, administrative bulletins, or related documents.

A3. Tactic: Call informal meetings to share perceptions and outline needs.

A4. Tactic: Survey academically talented students in an effort to determine their needs.

A5. Tactic: Gather information on academically talented students from record keeping and counseling personnel.

A6. Tactic: Provide a brief analysis of the need for an honors program. This needs assessment should include information drawn from as many different sources as possible.

A7. Tactic: Distribute the needs assessment to administrators, selected faculty, and standing academic committees.

EXPLORATION STAGE

B. Strategy: Form Honors Planning Committee

B1. Tactic: Distribute memo to faculty explaining the goal of establishing an honors program and asking interested individuals to meet to discuss this topic.

B2. Tactic: Informally meet with faculty leaders individually and urge them to become involved in the establishment of an honors program. Explain the need and the rationale.

B3. Tactic: Conduct planned, informal gatherings to explain the need for an honors program and urge individuals to attend the planning committee meetings.

EXPLORATION STAGE

C. Strategy: Create a formal proposal for an honors program.

C1. Tactic: Honors program planning committee develops an agenda and meets regularly.

C2. Tactic: Planning committee selects a writing committee, or one individual drawn from the group, to be responsible for translating the ideas of the committee into a formal written proposal.

C3. Tactic: One or more individuals reviews the related professional literature and reports this to the committee.

C4. Tactic: Planning committee attempts to reach consensus upon crucial issues, including:

1. rationale and goal statement
2. curriculum components
3. selection and evaluation of faculty
4. faculty training needs
5. faculty incentives
6. entrance criteria
7. maintenance criteria
8. appropriate recruitment activities
9. target populations
10. student incentives
11. administrative network
12. required resources

EXPLORATION STAGE

C5. Tactic: Planning committee includes as many different sectors of college personnel as possible in the planning process.

FORMULATION STAGE

A. Strategy: Formal proposal circulated, discussed, modifed

A1. Tactic: Copies of proposal sent to administrators and selected faculty for input

A2. Tactic: Proposal circulated to such critical area personnel as admissions, counseling, record keeping, financial aid

A3. Tactic: Proposal discussed in Division and Department meetings with representative of planning committee present

A4. Tactic: Proposal discussed at Academic Planning Committee meeting

A5. Tactic: Rewrite original proposal following discussion and debate. Submit to proper channels for approval

FORMULATION STAGE

B. Strategy: Determine obstacles and confront opposition

B1. Tactic: Anticipate the philosophical arguments against honors programs. Be prepared to articulate counter-arguments by relating a clear statement of rationale and goals.

B2. Tactic: Determine the amount of energy and funds directed toward other special programs. This information may be used to help justify the relatively small expenditure usually required for honors programs.

FORMULATION STAGE

C. Strategy: Address faculty development needs.

C1. Tactic: After decisions are made concerning the selection of faculty and the identification of their essential roles and functions, formulate ongoing plans to assist faculty in developing honors curriculum.

C2. Tactic: Locate a consultant to provide faculty with training sessions addressing the following two topics: 1) developing an honors curriculum, 2) dealing with the special challenges offered by academically talented students.

C3. Tactic: Schedule time for faculty to meet on a regular basis to discuss curriculum development and other related concerns.

TRIAL STAGE

A. Strategy: Begin trial project

A1. Tactic: Offer a limited number of honors sections involving a limited number of students.

A2. Tactic: Initiate a limited number of extra curricular activities for honors students.

TRIAL STAGE

B. Strategy: Initiate an informal evaluation and readjustment procedure

B1. Tactic: Initiate student evaluation

B2. Tactic: Seek feedback from faculty and administrators participating in the program.

B3. Tactic: Form committee of administrators, faculty, and students who are uninvolved in the program and ask them to evaluate it.

B4. Tactic: Retain an outside consultant to evaluate the success of the program.

TRIAL STAGE

C. Strategy: Identify and recruit students

C1. Tactic: After appropriate entrance criteria have been established, determine target populations and contact those populations

C2. Tactic: Initiate and develop liasons with students, teachers, and administrators at local high schools.

C3. Tactic: Ask college faculty to discuss the program in their classes.

C4. Tactic: Develop brochure and other informative documents, and circulate them in an appropriate manner.

C5. Tactic: Include Honors Programs section in the college catalogue and in college-high school articulation manual.

REFINEMENT STAGE

A. Strategy: Distribute results of informal evaluation and evaluation by external agents

A1. Tactic: Make presentations at division meetings and other committee meetings relating the results of the evaluation, and seek reactions.

A2. Tactic: Write a brief report based upon the results of the evaluation and distribute it. Again, seek reactions.

A3. Tactic: Make necessary adjustments based upon recommendations found in evaluation and reaction materials.

REFINEMENT STAGE

B. Strategy: Initiate follow-up studies of graduates of the trial program.

B1. Tactic: Send out questionnaires to graduates concerning their experiences while in the program.

B2. Tactic: Personally interview as many graduates as possible to gather similar data.

REFINEMENT STAGE

C. Strategy: Set up Advisory Committee of students and community representatives.

C1. Tactic: Locate student leaders who will participate as committee members.

C2. Tactic: Locate community leaders who will participate as committee members.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION STAGE

A. Strategy: Select personnel for decision-making positions.

A1. Tactic: Determine administrative framework. This usually includes an Honors Council working under the direction of the Chief Academic officer.

A2. Tactic: Select one individual to oversee the total project. This individual usually receives guidance from an Honors Council.

A3. Tactic: Decide upon the program's organizational chart. It should resemble the following hierarchy:

1. Chief Academic Office

2. Honors Council, including

   a. Campus Provosts (or their designees)
   b. Division Chairpersons (or their designees)
   c. Dean for Instructional Advancement (or a designee)
   d. Program Director
   e. Faculty leaders

3. Program Director

4. Honors Faculty

A4. Tactic: Assign the Program Director the following responsibilities:

1. Be responsible for the overall operation of the program.

2. Provide publicity and information services.

3. Organize recruitment activities.

4. Screen prospective students.

5. Maintain records on student progress and certify student achievement.

6. Select faculty for Honors Council approval.

7. Evaluate honors course proposals.

8. Evaluate teacher effectiveness.

9. Organize special orientation and registration activities.

10. Handle budgetary concerns.

11. Provide a liaison between faculty and administration.

12. Oversee the awarding of scholarships through a coordinated effort with the Financial Aid Director.

A5. Tactic: Assign the Honors Council the following responsibilities:

1. Recommend policies and procedures.

2. Approve course proposals.

3. Approve faculty staffing recommended by the director.

4. Assist with student transfers and scholarships.

5. Assist with the requisition of needed funds for faculty development, publicity, or other program needs not provided for in the director's budget.

A6. Tactic: Identify the primary administrator responsible for honors funding support. Send committee meeting minutes, announcements, newsletters, and other pertinent information to that office on a regular basis.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION STAGE

B. Strategy: Establish permanent office locations.

B1. Tactic: Designate an office for the Honors Director, with clerical assistance available.

B2. Tactic: Establish an Honors Library.

B3. Tactic: Establish an Honors Lounge.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION STAGE

C. Strategy: Increase recruitment activity.

C1. Tactic: Arrange for initial graduates of program to visit local high schools.

C2. Tactic: Obtain lists of academically talented students from high school counselors; contact these students.

C3. Tactic: Arrange for academically talented students to visit the college campus for various activities, particularly for extended periods during the summer.

C4. Tactic: Request that honors program participants write a personal letter to prospective students encouraging them to participate in the honors program.

C5. Tactic: Refine and improve the incentives offered to students, including scholarships and special recognition.

C6. Tactic: Provide guidance counselors (both on-campus and at the local high schools) with additional and regularly updated information that can be readily dispersed.

C7. Tactic: Seek favorable publicity in the local newspaper and other media outlets.

C8. Tactic: Informative brochure updated regularly and sent to local high schools.

C9. Tactic: Maintain contact with non-traditional students by visiting evening classes, veterans associations, women's studies centers etc. in order to explain the program.

C10. Tactic: Provide transfer assistance to program graduates in the following manner:

1. Provide seminars on the admissions process.

2. Review applications sent to senior institutions.

3. Write specific and detailed letters of reference.

4. Visit senior institutions in order to inform them of the honors program.

5. Maintain a file of past applications sent to senior institutions by program graduates.

Brief summary of Martorana and Kuhn's "Interactive Forces Theory." (Martorana and Kuhns, 1975).

Martorana and Kuhns theorized that academic innovation undergos identifiable "stages resulting from the interplay of forces over a period of time." They also theorized that these stages could be divided into "five finite developmental stages: exploration, formulation, trial, refinement, and institutionalization." These five stages can be defined in the following manner:

Exploration. The stage in the life cycle of an innovation marked by "...discussion, exploration, and conceputalization. This stage extends from the first awareness of the innovation to the first official action sanctioning an effort in this direction" (p. 179).

Formulation. The formulation stage is characterized by information-compiling of the "elements and issues identified during the exploration stage. The formulation stage ends when a decision is made to try the innovation" (p. 179).

Trial. The trial stage of academic innovation is a "pilot operation limited in time and scope but otherwise involving all institutional elements which would be included were the practice permanent" (p. 179).

Refinement. The refinement stage of academic innovation extends from the initial trial of the proposal "to the point of decision to continue innovative development, but with the purpose of sharpening its focus or design" (p. 179).

Institutionalization. This stage involves the "full acceptance of the innovation, including its movement into the regular operations of the institution. A new state of equilibrium has been reached, institutionalized being closure of the developmental cycle" (p. 180).

Martorana, S.V. & Kuhns, E. (1975). Managing academic change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

(Note: New edition at press.)

A FEW REASONS TO ESTABLISH AND SUPPORT AN HONORS PROGRAM

EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT HONORS PROGRAMS CAN HELP TO PROMOTE THE FOLLOWING GOALS:

1. RECOGNIZE AND MEET THE UNIQUE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF TALENTED AND MOTIVATED STUDENTS.

2. ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PERFORM AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EXCELLENCE OF WHICH THEY ARE CAPABLE.

3. ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENTED AND MOTIVATED STUDENTS.

4. DERIVE FROM THE PROGRAM BENEFITS FOR THE ENTIRE CAMPUS.

5. ENHANCE THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE COLLEGE AS A PLACE WHERE EXCELLENCE IS ENCOURAGED.

6. CHALLENGE AND PROVIDE INTRINSIC REWARDS TO FACULTY.

7. PROVIDE ACADEMIC BALANCE TO THE CURRICULUM.

8. SERVE AS A CENTER FOR INNOVATIONS THAT MAY SPREAD TO OTHER ACADEMIC AREAS.

9. PROVIDE INCENTIVES AND RECOGNITION FOR TALENTED AND MOTIVATED STUDENTS.

10. ATTRACT AND RETAIN FACULTY MEMBERS COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAMS.

"BY PERMITTING LOW TUITION (COMMUNITY COLLEGES) TO OFFER THEIR MOST TALENTED AND SERIOUS STUDENTS THE KIND OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE LIMITED TO STUDENTS AT EXPENSIVE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES, HONORS HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE EGALITARIAN TRADITION OF EXTENDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY TO THE LESS AFFLUENT."

-Terry L. Smith

"WITH AN INCREASED FOCUS ON ACHIEVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THESE INSTITUTIONS NOT BECOME PLACES FOR ONLY THOSE WITH POOR ACADEMIC SKILLS. YET, OVERWHELMED BY THE PROBLEMS OF THE UNPREPARED AND THE TASK OF PROVIDING SUPPORT TO THEM, THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE HAS, OVER A PERIOD OF TIME, NEGLECTED SUPERIOR STUDENTS. THESE STUDENTS REPRESENT ONE MORE ASPECT OF OUR TOTAL DIVERSITY, AND THEY CAN BE WELL SERVED IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES. THE SUPERIOR STUDENT IS AN IMPORTANT ASSET, NOT ONLY TO OTHER STUDENTS, BUT ALSO IN BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A POSITIVE PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARD THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE."

-Robert McCabe

"HIGH COST, LABOR-INTENSIVE DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS SEEM TO BE AN ACCEPTED PART OF (THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CURRICULUM) WHILE, IN MANY INSTANCES, IT IS ERRONEOUSLY ASSUMED THAT THE BRIGHT STUDENT DOES NOT NEED ANY HELP OR ENCOURAGEMENT TO SUCCEED."

-William E. Piland

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